

# *Suffolk Nansemond* HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2022



## HISTORIC CEDAR HILL CEMETERY

In 1802, the Town of Suffolk purchased 2 ½ acres of the old Constantia farm for the purpose of building a community chapel. The Anglican Church (at the intersection of present day Church Street and Western Avenue) had been abandoned at the end of the Revolutionary War. Interest in the new denominations had grown and those who still worshipped from the Book of Common Prayer needed a place as well.

So the town built a simple frame structure there on the hill. Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians (blacks in the balcony, whites downstairs) used the little meeting house at various times during any given month, and people were buried on the church grounds-whites, some blacks, Indians, and, during the War Between the States, some Federal soldiers as well as Confederates.

This shared house of worship was used at that site for several decades. One by one, the white denominations built their own houses of worship. Eventually, Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal Church, established in 1870 and the first Negro congregation in Suffolk, moved the building to Pine Street where it is still in use today, with additions and a brick facade.

The burial ground continued to be used and became crowded. More of the Constantia farm was purchased and later, still more. Once there was a bridge over a stream called Hickman's Branch that was between the town and the hill. Over time the Branch was filled in or silted in and now it is part of the Cemetery as well. (cont'd pg. 2)

### IN THIS ISSUE:

- Cedar Hill History
- Archives w/Debra Smith
- NEW EXHIBIT
- Civil War Tour
- Touch-A-Truck Fundraiser
- Special Collections

The spot was first known as Green Hill Cemetery, and it is unclear when the name Cedar Hill was adopted. Perhaps the name was given by Wilbur John Kilby, who was Superintendent of Cedar Hill from 1887 until his death in 1907. He was born in a house that still stands at the entrance to the old burial ground and he was Judge of the Nansemond County Court (1896-1904). According to the brochure entitled "A Walk Down Main Street, it was he who turned an almost unkempt wilderness into a place of symmetry and attractiveness.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society Newsletters

From *History of Suffolk and Nansemond County, Virginia* by Ann H. Burton 1720 - *First Buildings DWELLING AND WAREHOUSE:*

Little is known of a definite character about the first family to establish itself at the site which was to become Suffolk. The founder of this family was John Constant, possibly from Hampshire, England. He built both a home and a warehouse on the south bank of the Nansemond River around 1720, probably slightly before. There is definite record of the operation of the warehouse (tobacco) by 1730. Shingles used in the construction were put on with wooden pegs, since this was long before the day of a plentiful nail supply. This warehouse was used to store ammunition during the Revolutionary War; it was torn down by the Yankees during the War Between the States.

The house escaped the ravages of both wars but fell into disrepair. Cedar Hill Cemetery developed all around it. The Suffolk Herald on January 3, 1883, reported: The remainder of Constantia farm, after cutting off a portion of it for the cemetery, was sold at public auction on the 27th of December (1882) for one thousand dollars. Mr. George F. Young of Providence, R.I., was the purchaser.

During the enlargement of the cemetery the house was demolished. Through the efforts of the local chapter (Constantia Chapter) of the DAR, a replica of the house was built on the very site of the original. It is called Constantia House.

The little settlement that sprang up around the two structures was known as Constant's Wharf or Constant's Warehouse. John Constant must have died there, for later records refer to the property of the Widow Constant. Constants do figure in the early history of the Kentucky and Illinois regions, for men with both the given and the surname of Suffolk's founder are known to have served with Daniel Boone and with George Rogers Clark, according to the Genealogical Editor of the DAR Magazine.

This little house has a history that far predates the 1742 charter of Suffolk. John Constant, believed to be the first permanent English settler in Suffolk, started a wharf and trading center that was the beginning of the town. He built a small frame house on the hill overlooking the river and the land on which it stood came to be called Constantia.

After the Revolutionary War the Church of England was abandoned and around 1802 the town fathers bought the south end of Constantia. There they constructed a chapel to be used by all denominations. The land around the chapel was used for burials. That's how Cedar Hill Cemetery started. More and more land was bought over the years.

In the 1920s the Constantia Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution took a good look at the decaying home of their namesake. They tore it down and built a replica on the same site in the graveyard.

Current view: For years it stayed there, sometimes hosting D.A.R. gatherings. However, by the late 20th century vandalism had taken a terrible toll on the little building and it was offered to anyone who would move it. Robert Baker accepted the challenge.

In its third life the Constantia House is behind R.W. Baker & Company Funeral Home. The replica has been lovingly reconstructed there. In its small front yard is another piece of history-the largest redwood tree in Virginia.



# COLLECTIONS CARE

with Debra Smith, Archivist

## RESEARCH



SNHS has an extensive research room with a desk and work area for our patrons. Subjects are categorized alphabetically for easy access. We assist people weekly in finding answers to their questions, graciously relying on the expertise of Kermit Hobbs and Sue Woodward. Sometimes we cannot find an answer, but we have met the most interesting people and enjoy hearing their history in relation to Suffolk and old Nansemond County.

Please contact us for any help you may need.

Also, if you have any Suffolk/Nansemond collections that you would like to place in our care for future generations, contact 757-539-2781 for an appointment.

## SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

### **WILLIANNNA JORDAN PINNER 1864-1935**

*Willianna Jordan was born in Prince George County Virginia. In 1885 she married Suffolk native, John Beauregard Pinner and they moved into their new home at 231 Pinner Street. Mr. Pinner had a law degree, was in the real estate business with his father and was president of Suffolk Peanut Company.*

*The Pinner's were leaders and great supporters of the Suffolk Presbyterian Church (original building located across the street from the Phillips-Dawson House). Mrs. Pinner was active in numerous organizations concerned for the betterment of the community. Perhaps the most notable was the Suffolk Women's Club, founded at a garden party at Mrs. Pinner's home. That club accomplished much good, particularly was the creation of Suffolk's first lending library.*



*Many thanks to John Pinner Graham, Durham, North Carolina for donating this beautiful portrait and to Lee King for facilitating the process. Mrs. Pinner will be enjoyed for many years to come.*

## COLLECTIONS

### PROCESSING ROOM



As the objects are accessioned and cataloged, a very detailed description and digital images are created. An EXCEL worksheet is used as a 'finding aid.' This is a quick reference for the objects that have been cataloged with their unique object ID number, location, and other useful information.

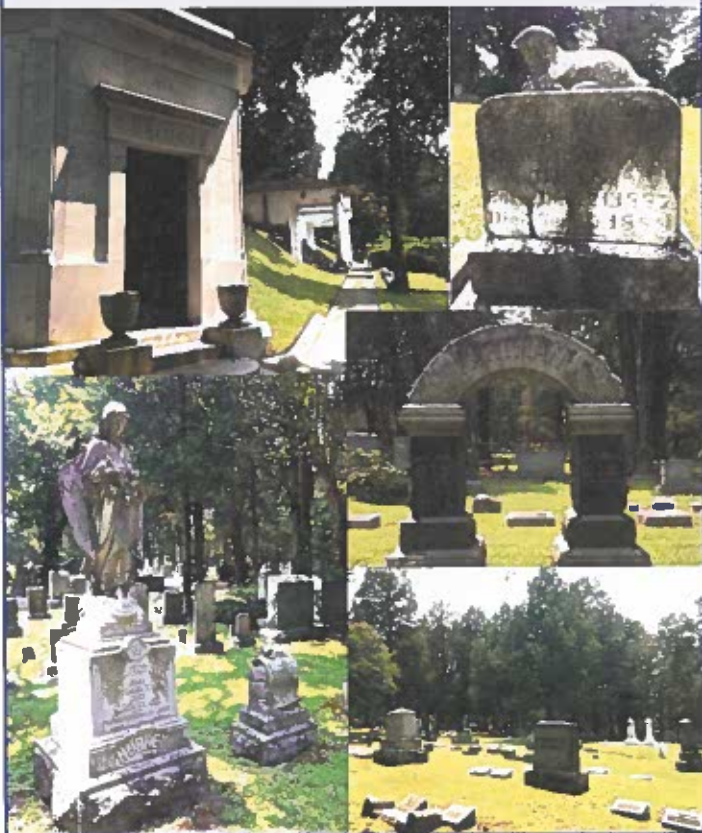


We are currently using bankers' boxes with archival quality tissue paper for temporary storage. Our goal is to upgrade these boxes to long term archival quality storage as objects are being archived. The collections are organized and stored on shelves on the third floor where there are two temperature controlled areas. We are using every square inch to accommodate our historical objects.



**UNION TOWN** - The "Contraband Camp" also known as Union Town, stood in the present Kingsboro neighborhood. It was built by slaves who had escaped or been freed by Union troops occupying Suffolk in 1862-1863. The town was described by a Rhode Island officer as a large village, compactly built of split hemlock boards, and all its inhabitants were contrabands who had left their masters and found refuge within our lines. The style of the exterior of some of (the buildings) would be credible to a summer resort like Martha's Vineyard. The camp was laid out in streets, and included one building used as a school and church. Union Town residents helped Union troops in construction of defensive earth-works around Suffolk and along the Nansemond River.

**OLD UNION CHURCH** - In a clearing (near the present day fountain) stood the Old Union Church, sometimes called the Old Meeting House, built in 1802. Until the late 1820's it was used by the community for worship and for other meetings. The building was the birthplace of several Suffolk churches that remain in operation today. The original church yard was once called Green Hill Cemetery and holds numerous unmarked graves. This later became the nucleus of Cedar Hill Cemetery.



**THE CONFEDERATE MONUMENT** - When the War Between the States ended, Thomas Washington Smith, who was with General Lee at Appomattox, made his way home by foot to Nansemond County. On this long journey home he vowed to erect a monument honoring the memory of his fellow soldiers. His dream was finally realized in November 1889, on Dedication Day. Thousands came by horse, carriage, train or on foot to remember the Confederate dead. The monument's base was constructed by a Norfolk man; the soldier is made of zinc cast in Bridgeport, Connecticut. In 1874, these zinc monuments were produced under the name white bronze. All manufacturing ceased in 1930, and molds were melted down and the metal used for implements in WWII. Zinc monuments are rare and can be identified in cemeteries by their blue-gray color and by the lack of moss and mildew on them.



*Suffolk Tourism offers the following tours:*

**CEDAR HILL CEMETERY TOUR**

**VICTORIAN SUFFOLK: DYING TO BE THERE,  
A GUIDED DISCOVERY OF CEDAR HILL CEMETERY**

**HOMETOWN HEROES TOUR OF CEDAR HILL**

*CALL (757)514-4130*



PRESENTED BY THE SUFFOLK-NANSEMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CITY OF SUFFOLK

**SATURDAY**  
**OCTOBER 29, 2022**  
**11AM-2PM**

*Behind the Courthouse  
on North Commerce St.*

**757.539.2781**

Like Us On  
facebook 



**JOIN US FOR HALLOWEEN FUN!**

**Wear costumes & bring trick-or-treat bags!**

**Tickets: \$5 per person or 4 for \$15.**

Tickets available at the gate on the day of the event.



## Suffolk in 1864: An Unbearable Place

*by Kermit Hobbs*

To the 300 or so people who remained in Suffolk in the spring of 1864, life had become all but unbearable. Most had breathed a sigh of relief as the occupying force of Yankees had withdrawn the previous summer, but with them had gone any semblance of civil government.

The town of Suffolk had become a no-man's land, just as the country west of the Nansemond River and the Dismal Swamp had been since the arrival of the Union Forces two years earlier. Even though the majority of the Union troops had been withdrawn, an outpost was set up east of Suffolk to keep an eye on things in the town and surrounding country. They frequently sent patrols through the area, searching for food supplies such as coffee or sugar, or anything that sustained life or would allow the farmers to be able to raise a crop.

This was true particularly among the citizens who had refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States government. The Hillsboro Recorder reported on June 22 that "a party (of Union troops) came into Suffolk last Friday with 114 horses and mules taken from their owners."

The townspeople were nearly helpless to resist these raids, and in late 1863, they appealed to the Confederate authorities to do something about it. The opportunity came three months later, when a brigade of Confederate infantry commanded by Gen. Matthew Ransom was making a sweep through the areas of southeast Virginia and northeast North Carolina just outside the zone controlled by the Union forces.

On March 9, 1864, the Confederate brigade was camped near Bethlehem Church, on the South Quay Road (now Holland Road), about three miles west of Suffolk. That morning they received a report that Union Cavalry was making a raid in Suffolk at that very moment.

The Rebel foot soldiers, fearing that their enemy would escape before they could reach them, ran the three miles to town. As they entered the town, the exhausted soldiers were cheered by the Suffolk ladies, and many received ladles of water to drink as they passed.

When the Confederates got their first distant glimpses of the blue uniforms of Union cavalry, they unlimbered their cannon and fired several shots into their midst before continuing their charge.

The surprised and outnumbered cavalymen resisted the advancing Rebels, firing back as they themselves slowly withdrew. The fighting was intense and bitter; at times it was house to house.

The Union cavalry made good its escape, leaving many Confederate foot soldiers disappointed they had been unable to capture or destroy their enemy. Still, they had captured supplies and equipment left behind the retreating enemy.

Better yet, to their eyes, they took great satisfaction in the feeling that they had struck a blow on behalf of the civilians of Suffolk.





## Civil War Tour with Kermit Hobbs

Back by popular demand again this year, Kermit Hobbs will lead a bus/walking tour of Suffolk Civil War sites.

**WHEN: Saturday, October 1st**

**WHERE: 524 N. Main St**

**TIME: 1:00 - 4:00pm**

**PRICE: \$20 per person**

## NEW EXHIBIT



## The Artistry of Beth Blanchard

A lifelong resident of Hampton Roads, Beth developed her love of painting and teaching through local artists and instructors like Cleta Norcross, Wayne Fucher, and Robert Lemasters. Beth believes that every person has an artistic bent, and it's her goal as a teacher to help her students discover the art they were created to make. Whether she is teaching a four year old how to draw, encouraging the teenager to let go and enjoy the process, or guiding the adult student back to the basics, she loves equipping and encouraging others in their artistic pursuits just as she was encouraged by her former teachers. Beth has taught students drawing, acrylics, oils, watercolors, printing, collage, clay, weaving, calligraphy, and art history, but oil painting is her passion. Beth has taught privately, at her church, and as a 11-12th grade teacher at Suffolk Christian Academy.

After visiting Suffolk-Hansemond Historical Society and viewing historical photos, Beth started painting interpretations of the black and white photos in full color. She adds meaningful dialogue with each piece. Many of her other works will also be exhibited during September and October.

## Calendar of Events



**Sunday, SEPTEMBER 18th**

*"An Afternoon at Kermit's Folly"*

**Saturday, OCTOBER 1st**

*"Civil War Tour"*

**Saturday, OCTOBER 29th**

*"Touch-A-Truck & Trick-or-Treat"*



## An Afternoon at Kermit's Folly

You are invited to enjoy an afternoon of music from a plethora of antique musical instruments, ranging from the 1885 "Little Gem" Roller Organ to the magnificent 1917 Chickering AMPICO Reproducing Parlor Grand piano.

Refreshments will be provided by Stillwater Tea House. The event will be held from 3 to 5pm, Sunday afternoon, September 18, 2022, at 1001 West Washington Street, Suffolk.

Tickets are \$15 each and may be obtained from Suffolk-Hansemond Historical Society at 757-539-2781.

Seating is limited, so get yours now!

## ANNUAL HEIRLOOM SALE



*"..will take place in Spring 2023"*  
**TAKING DONATIONS NOW  
UNTIL APRIL**

## HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday	10:00am-2:00pm
Tuesday	10:00am-2:00pm
Wednesday	CLOSED
Thursday	10:00am-2:00pm
Friday	APPOINTMENT ONLY
Saturday	CLOSED
Sunday	CLOSED



## CHECK OUT OUR WEBPAGE:

[suffolkhistory.org](http://suffolkhistory.org)

## LIKE US ON FACEBOOK:

[Facebook.com/snvahistory](https://www.facebook.com/snvahistory)

## FOLLOW US ON TWITTER:

[twitter.com/SNVAhistory](https://twitter.com/SNVAhistory)

## *Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society*

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kerry Holmes, President  
Tommy Arthur Vice President  
Kermit Hobbs, Treasurer/Historian  
Steve Jackson Secretary  
Lisa Amos  
Amy Ford  
Jordan Graf  
Lee King  
Ralph Nagra  
Justin Sorensen

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Kimberly Blair Greene

### ARCHIVIST

Debra Calvin Smith